

BOB DYLAN: A BARGAIN WITH THE DEVIL?

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From my “hippie” days prior to conversion, I well remember rock legend Bob Dylan (1941-) (real name Robert Zimmerman). It was in 1962 that Dylan legally changed his name and produced his debut album. His famous song “The Times They Are A-Changin’” appeared in 1964. I had started listening to rock music intently in the early 1960s, and I was consumed with that type of music until I was saved in 1973. That was the heyday of Dylan’s career, and I still recall the haunting, sensual nature of his music. He helped to popularize the merging of folk and rock music and sang some very immoral songs as well as songs with pacifistic, civil rights, socialistic, humanistic, and New Age themes. He was one of the chief poets of the ’60s rock generation, though he denies that today and claims that he was merely making music. His songs posed many interesting questions, but he had no answers. In “Blowing in the Wind,” he asked such things as, “How many roads must a man walk down before he is called a man?” What is the answer? “The answer, my friends, is blowing in the wind...” What does that mean? It means he doesn’t know the answer and he is not sure anyone knows the answer. Sadly, that is the philosophy of most of Dylan’s fans because they have rejected the Bible.

Dylan’s vast influence has been anything but wholesome and godly. It was Dylan who introduced the Beatles to marijuana (Peter Brown, *The Love You Make: An Insider’s Story of the Beatles*). Dylan “went through some profound drug experiences during 1964-5, taking up Baudelaire’s formula for immortality: ‘A poet makes himself a seer by a long prodigious and rational disordering of the senses.’ He ... tried just about everything he could to ‘open his head’ as biographer Tony Scaduto puts it” (*Waiting for the Man*, p. 144). Many of Dylan’s songs were about drugs, including “Lay Down Your Weary Tune,” “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” and “Mr. Tambourine Man.”

There was even violence at some Dylan concerts. For example, in Slane, Ireland, in July 1984, the police had to barricade themselves inside their station as mobs of Dylan fans besieged them, rioting, breaking windows, and overturning cars.

Dylan’s backup group, which was known only as the Band, was formerly called Ronnie Hawkins and the Hawks. They “had a reputation for pill popping, whoring, and brawling that was second to none” (Robert Palmer, *Rock & Roll an Unruly History*, p. 3).

The cover to Dylan’s *Desire* album (1976) depicts him smoking marijuana in one corner, a black magic tarot card in another corner, and a huge Buddha in the bottom corner. Next

to the Buddha are the words: “I have a brother or two and a whole lot of Karma to burn ... Isis and the moon shine on me” (Muncy, *The Role of Rock*, p. 167).

In 1978, Dylan attended a home Bible study with girlfriend Mary Alice. She had recently “re-dedicated her life to Christ” and was concerned that she was living with an unsaved man who was not her husband. She invited two assistant pastors from the Hollywood Vineyard Church (associated with the Vineyard Christian Fellowship) to visit Dylan’s home. Dylan’s testimony was as follows: “One thing led to another ... until I had this feeling, this vision and feeling. I truly had a born-again experience, if you want to call it that. It’s an over-used term, but it’s something that people can relate to” (Steve Turner, *Hungry for Heaven*, p. 160, citing a November 1980 interview with Robert Hillburn of the *Los Angeles Times*). From this testimony, we can see the influence of false Vineyard theology, which focuses on experiential feelings, visions, voices, personal prophecies, healing, tongues, spirit slayings, and such things. This experiential-oriented theology does not produce stability in the Christian life. Dylan spent three and a half months at the Vineyard church’s School of Discipleship, and his next three albums, *Slow Train Coming* (1979), *Saved* (1980), and *Shot of Love* (1981), were gospel albums of sorts.

Dylan then repudiated any claim to the Christian faith and went back to his standard rock music. Dylan never attended church regularly and soon quite altogether. Even rock historian Steve Turner, who has attempted to justify Dylan’s apostasy, admits: “The womanizing and drunkenness that Dylan once saw as evidence of the old life have apparently continued almost uninterrupted” (Turner, “Watered Down Love,” *Christianity Today*, May 21, 2001). Dylan’s 1983 album was titled *Infidels*. The July 21, 1983, issue of the *Washington Post* noted that Dylan believes in reincarnation and that “everyone is born knowing the truth.” An article in the *San Luis Obispo* (California) *Register* for March 16, 1983, quoted Dylan as saying: “Whoever said I was Christian? Like Gandhi, I’m Christian, I’m Jewish, I’m a Moslem, I’m a Hindu. I am a humanist.” In recent years, Dylan has practiced Lubavitch Hasidism, an ultra-orthodox form of Judaism, suggesting he has returned to his Jewish roots.

In September 1997, Dylan performed before Pope John Paul II at a Roman Catholic youth festival in Bologna, Italy. A crowd of 300,000 young people attended the festival. The 56-year-old Dylan sang two songs directly to the Pope. Dylan then took off his cowboy hat and bowed before him. The Catholic organizer of the festival, Cardinal Ernesto Vecchi, said that he had invited Dylan because he is the “representative of the best type of rock” and “he has a spiritual nature.”

DYLAN MADE A BARGAIN WITH THE DEVIL

In a rare interview with Ed Bradley, aired on the *60 Minutes* program, June 26, 2005, the 63-year-old rock singer said that his early songs were “almost magically written ... kind of a penetrating magic.”

He also said that he made a bargain with the devil.

Question: Why do you still do it? Why are you still out here?

Dylan: It goes back to that destiny thing. I made a bargain with it a long time ago, and I'm holding up my end.

Q: What was your bargain?

Dylan: To get where I am now.

Q: Should I ask whom you made the bargain with?

Dylan: With the chief commander.

Q: On this earth?

Dylan: (laughing) On this earth and the world we can't see.

It could be argued that Dylan was referring to a bargain he made with God, but that makes no sense. As Brian Snider wrote to me on this matter: "Who makes a bargain with God to be a rock star? Everyone knows you make that deal with the devil. Down at the crossroads." This refers to the old Blues concept of selling one's soul to the devil. Bluesman Robert Johnson and others have sung about it.

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